The Story of OZZY OSBOURNE

Madman Prince of Darkness Showman

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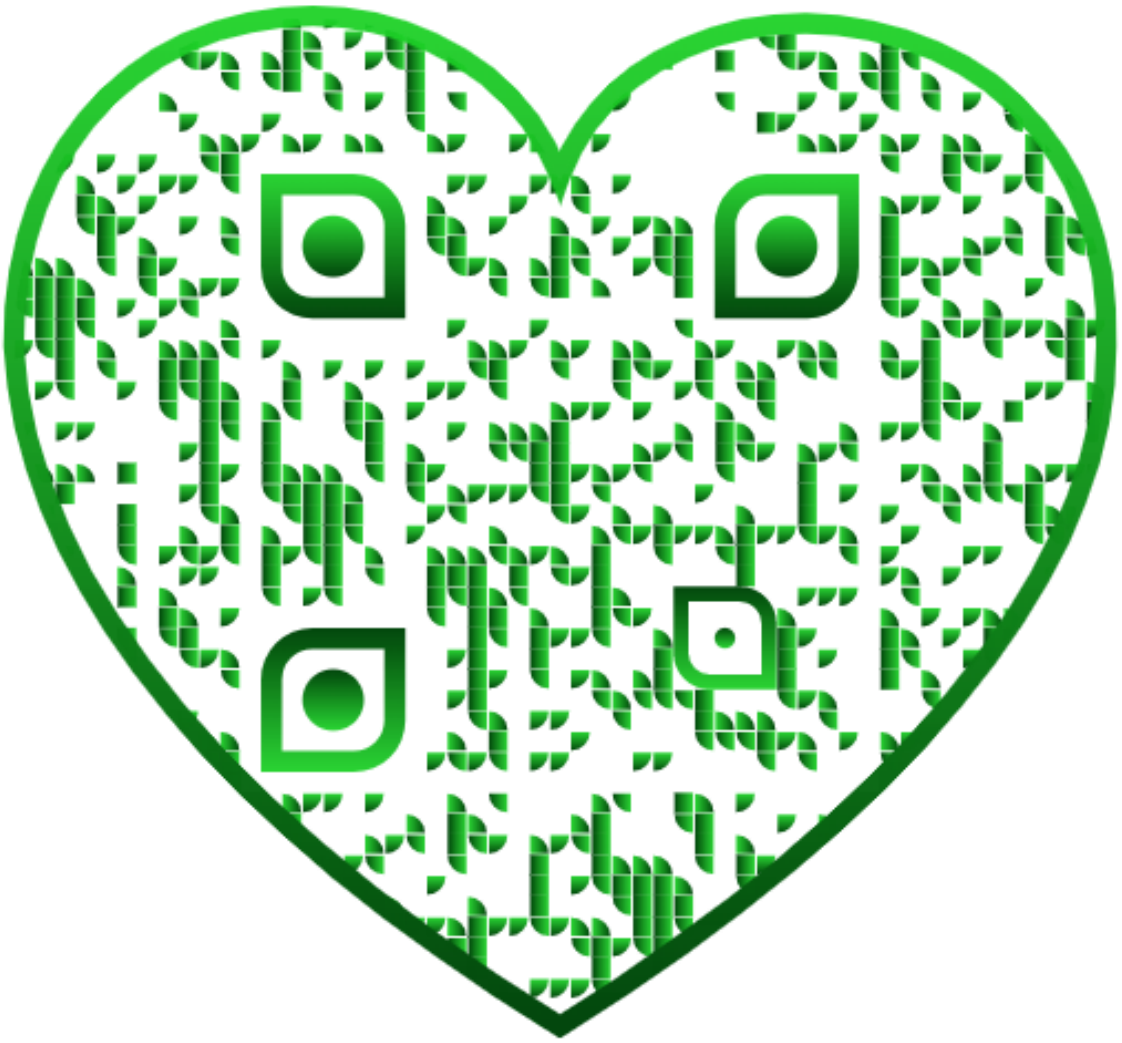

The Story of
OZZY OSBOURNE

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Introduction

Why we love Ozzy Osbourne

FROM THE HEART

VICTORY OF A MADMAN

Osbourne's life and career are testaments to perseverance and his ability to overcome hardships and his own personal struggles. Along the way, he helped change rock 'n' roll forever.

COMPOSING HIMSELF
It's easy to forget that Osbourne the showman is, at heart, a music lover, who found solace when he was younger in playing the piano and listening to The Beatles.

Since he was a boy, Ozzy Osbourne has struggled to see himself in a positive light.

This chronic mental-health struggle, coupled with a series of other setbacks—including the onset of Parkinson's disease—made the COVID-19 lockdown an especially miserable time for one of the living legends of heavy metal.

"When I am in a room on my own, it is a bad f---ing place," he says in the 2020 documentary *The Nine Lives of Ozzy Osbourne*. "Our heads are our worst enemies in times like this because people are locked up and worried about this pandemic. They need to unload because if you do not unload, you'll get depressed. My therapist suggested that I start meditating again. I am on this new antidepressant which is working wonders."

There is a pattern to Osbourne's life and career: He strives to succeed, he stumbles and falls, and then he gets back up and triumphs—even if he has to ask for help. The formula has made him a perfectly imperfect pioneer, a singer who is often overlooked for his musical accomplishments with Black Sabbath and as a solo performer, and—during a surprising third act—one of the early success stories of reality television with *The Osbournes*.

Whether he realizes it or not, the Prince of Darkness has contributed a lot to the modern world. The journey has been far from smooth, a bumpy road of addiction, public embarrassments and private shame. But still he perseveres, never giving up hope or giving in to the struggle.

This is the story of Ozzy Osbourne, a self-proclaimed "madman" who beat the odds and succeeded—simply by being himself.

FACES OF THE MUSIC
There was a time in music before Black Sabbath (from left: Bill Ward, Tony Iommi, Osbourne and Geezer Butler), and a time after. Heavy metal didn't exist before the band's 1970 debut album.

FAMILY GUY
Osbourne and his wife, Sharon, with their children on the grounds of their Beverly Hills home in 1997. From left: Kelly, Sharon, Aimee, Jack and Ozzy.

TEA AND INFAMY
Osbourne had tea in London in 2008 with Slash (near left) before the Guns N' Roses guitarist presented him with a Living Legend honor at the Classic Rock Roll of Honour awards.

Chapter 1

Osbourne formed a band and, in the process, created a genre

BECOMING BLACK SABBATH

DARK VICTORY
Osbourne and the original lineup of Black Sabbath in 1969, the year the band adopted its iconic name. From left: Tony Iommi, Osbourne, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward.

YOUNG PRINCE
In photos from his childhood, Ozzy (left, top and bottom) looks nothing like the Prince of Darkness. He was merely the fourth of six children in a working-class family.

STAGE SOUNDS
Osbourne (right, second from left) was going by "Ozzy Zig" in 1968, when he posted a flyer looking for bandmates—and advertising that he had his own PA system.

Before his 18th birthday, John Michael "Ozzy" Osbourne

had already made good on his father's prediction that his son would either do something very special or go to prison. Living on the streets of Birmingham, England, after he'd dropped out of school, Ozzy got caught stealing what he thought were valuable clothes—but which turned out to be baby bibs and toddler underpants—while wearing a glove with a missing thumb, leaving behind fingerprints. "Not exactly Einstein," the cop said as he cuffed him. To teach his son a lesson, Ozzy's strict father, John Thomas "Jack" Osbourne, refused to pay the 40 quid fine, leaving Ozzy to serve six weeks at Winson Green Prison, a Victorian-era facility that opened in 1849.

Ozzy was prone to paranoia, and the experience only intensified his youthful anxiety. "Fear of impending doom ruled my life," he revealed in the A&E documentary *The Nine Lives of Ozzy Osbourne*. Born in Birmingham on Dec. 3, 1948, the son of working-class parents, Ozzy grew up in a household of six children—he had three older sisters and two younger brothers. "It was pandemonium," he wrote in his 2010 autobiography, *I Am Ozzy*.

Surrounded by madness, Ozzy held fast to two things: music and an extroverted personality. By the time he was a teen, his reputation as a clown had already

Laney
Laney
Laney
Slingerland

MOVIE MONIKER
Black Sabbath took its name from a 1963 Italian horror film starring Boris Karloff (below). Osbourne told his bandmates they should make "scary music."

SAVED BY SINGING
To escape from the chaos in his family life—he had five brothers and sisters—Osbourne (right, performing at a festival in Munich in 1970) retreated into music.

earned him the nickname Ozzy from classmates. But behind the goofiness, he harbored a serious interest in records, radio, the piano and, especially, The Beatles. Ozzy wanted to sing, but he needed a band.

In mid-1968, Osbourne posted a flyer at a Birmingham music shop. His ad began: "Ozzy Zig needs gig, experienced frontman." What sealed Osbourne's future was the kicker: He had his "own PA system." This meant whoever joined Ozzy would not only be able to play music, they would be able to play it *loud*.

Guitarist Tony Iommi and drummer Bill Ward played together in a band called Mythology, which was breaking up. When they saw Ozzy's ad, Iommi said to Ward: "I know an Ozzy, but it can't be him." It was. He and Iommi had once been schoolmates, but they hadn't gotten along particularly well, and Osbourne had to convince Iommi to give him a chance. "I think the fact I had a PA system probably helped," he later admitted.

Bassist Geezer Butler also saw the ad. He was playing in a band called Rare Breed, but it, too, was falling apart. So the four lads found each other through "Ozzy Zig." (Osbourne doesn't know where he came up with the name "Zig.")

The group's original name was Polka Tulk Blues Band—named after a brand of talcum powder Osbourne's mother liked. As the name suggested,

HEAD BANGER
Osbourne performing onstage with guitarist Iommi (far right) as Earth—an early incarnation of Black Sabbath—in Hamburg, Germany, in 1969.

The members of Black Sabbath hated being called "heavy metal."

most of the music they played was blues based, not rock. They also added a saxophonist and slide guitar player, and then booked their first gig on Aug. 24, 1968. Iommi said they were "awful," and Butler confessed, "We went down like the Titanic."

The band then changed their name to Earth, but after realizing another group was already using that name, the lads needed to come up with another one. They also needed a manager, which they found in trumpeter Jim Simpson, who helped them land gigs at local venues.

They rehearsed almost every day at a local community center, which happened to be across the street from a movie theater. One day, Iommi observed that he found it peculiar that people paid money to see horror movies. This prompted Osbourne to proclaim: "Why not make scary music?" Around this time, Butler had a nightmare of a dark apparition at the end of his bed that inspired the band's lasting name—and a life-changing single: "Black Sabbath," a reference to a 1963 Boris Karloff horror film.

The band's self-titled debut album was released in U.K. record stores on Feb. 13, 1970—Friday the 13th—a date selected to capitalize on the record's disturbing themes and sound. On the nearly seven-minute

Laney

CHAPTER 1

FOUR HORSEMEN
With loud music and macabre lyrics, Black Sabbath (below, left to right, Iommi, Ward, Osbourne and Butler) begat a new—and terrifying—genre of rock.

title track, Osbourne intones the ominous words, "What is this that stands before me, figure in black which points at me." The spooky song introduced the world to a new, darker genre of rock, one that would come to be known as heavy metal.

When the group incorporated the song into its shows, chaos ensued. "All the girls ran out of the venue screaming," Osbourne wrote in *I Am Ozzy*. This early period is when he earned a new nickname: the Prince of Darkness. "They thought we were Satan's f---ing friends," he said years later.

The album reached the top 10 in the U.K. and No. 23 in the U.S. *Rolling Stone* panned it, writing, "Just like Cream! But worse." For their part, the members of Black Sabbath hated being called "heavy metal"—they considered themselves "heavy rock." In 2020, *Rolling Stone* amended its assessment: "If a Martian were to land on Earth and ask, 'What is heavy metal?' the best answer would be to play 'Black Sabbath.'" With Osbourne at the center of the maelstrom, Black Sabbath was poised to cast a shadow over the rest of the 1970s—fulfilling both halves of Jack Osbourne's prophecy.

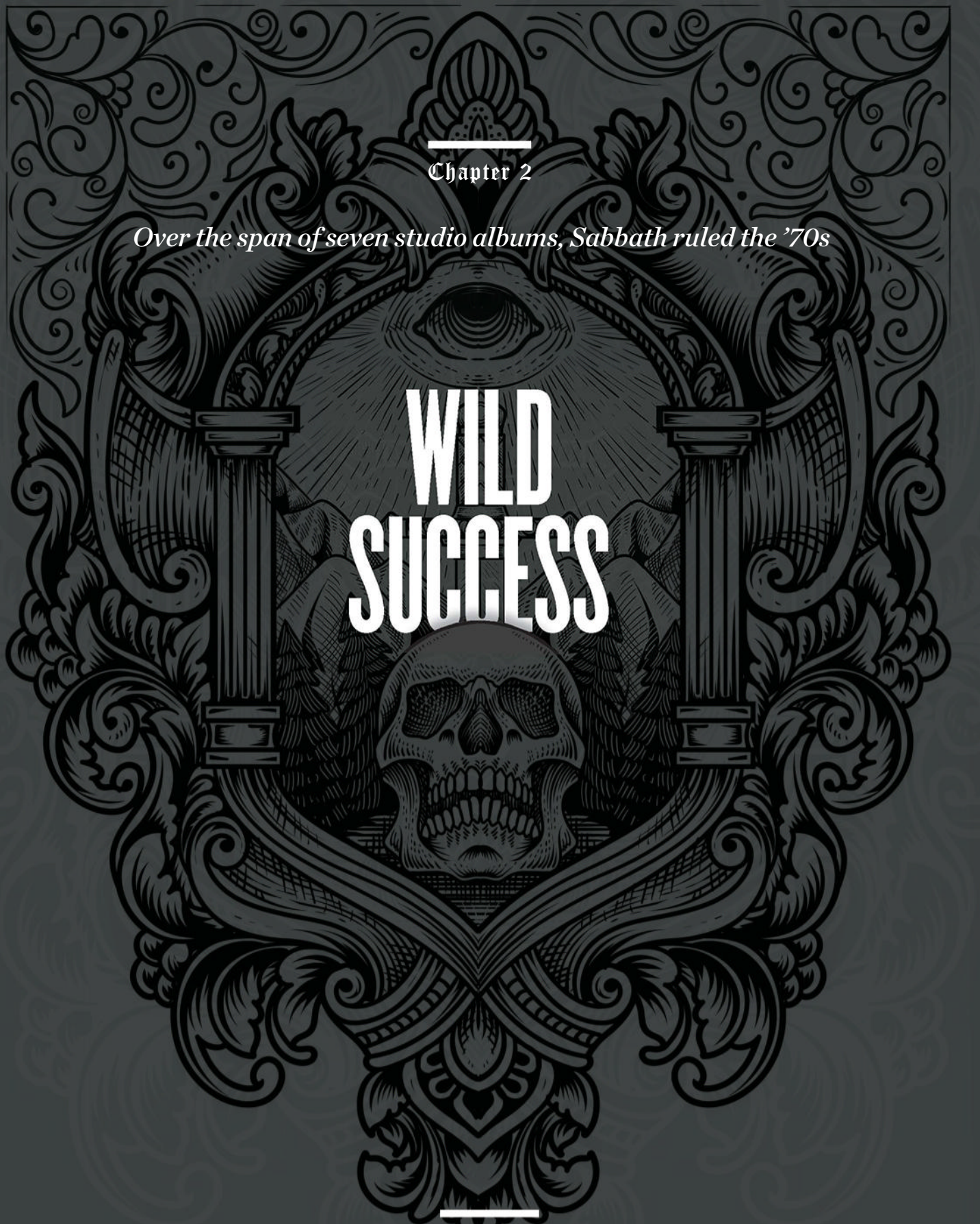
WITCH PROJECT
Critics panned it, but Black Sabbath's self-titled debut (above) reached the top 10 in the U.K. and rose to No. 23 in the U.S.—and influenced generations of musicians.

EXIT LIGHT
After the success of their first record, Osbourne (far right) and Black Sabbath were at the pinnacle of rock 'n' roll—and ready to usher in a new, darker era of rock.

Chapter 2

Over the span of seven studio albums, Sabbath ruled the '70s

WILD SUCCESS



CANDID CAMERA
Osbourne, smoking a cigarette and flipping through snapshots, passes some time during the Sabbath Bloody Sabbath Tour in the bar of Copenhagen's Plaza Hotel in 1974.

Apéritifs
Digestifs
Tabacs

Black Sabbath's debut album took off so fast that

fans heard it before the Birmingham lads themselves. "I had no idea what it sounded like," Osbourne later said. "So, I took a copy home to my mum and dad's place and put it on their record player. I recall my dad listening to it and saying to me, 'Are you sure all you're having is the occasional drink?'"

The short answer to that question was a resounding no. Capitalizing on their dark energy, Black Sabbath quickly started work on a second album. What the band produced propelled it to even greater heights. The songs on *Paranoid*, which came out on Sept. 18, 1970, just seven months after the release of *Black Sabbath*, covered supernatural catastrophes

SOPHOMORE CLASSIC
Released seven months after Sabbath's debut, *Paranoid* (above) was a No. 1 smash in the U.K., and remains one of the most influential heavy metal albums of all time.

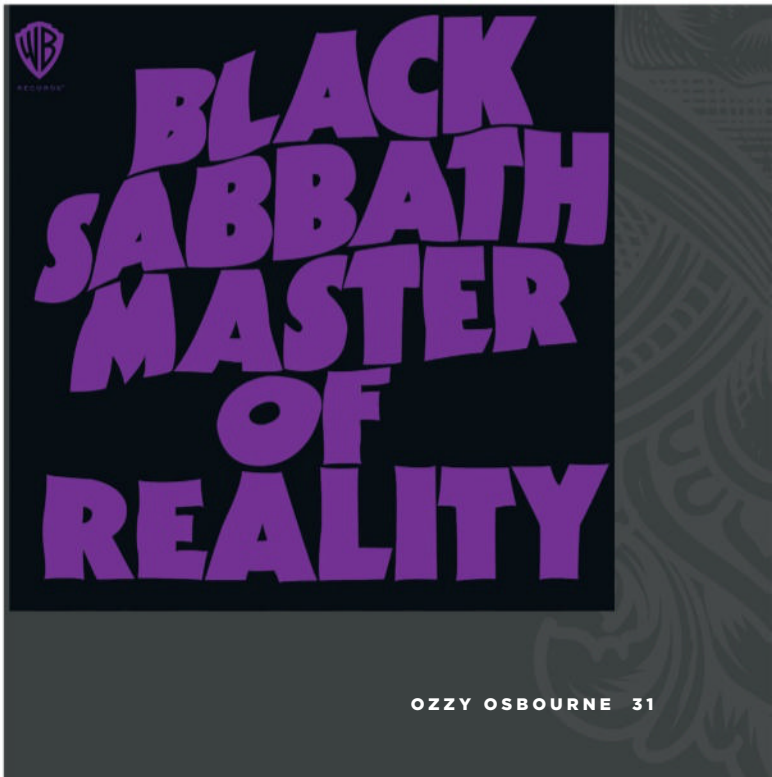
SUPERSTAR STATUS
Osbourne and Black Sabbath (right, from left: Tony Iommi, Geezer Butler) played for about 250,000 fans at the California Jam on April 6, 1974.

as well as the real horrors of death, depression, war, nuclear holocaust and drug abuse. It resonated with fans on both sides of the Atlantic.

The title track, "Paranoid," had made the record as a mere afterthought—the band needed to fill up three minutes to complete the album, and Osbourne was reading the lyrics as he sang them. "It was all extremely spontaneous in those days," he recalled in 2017. But the song took off and became a flag-planting hit. It reached No. 4 in the U.K. and No. 61 in the U.S. "Iron Man" reached No. 52 in the States, a stunning feat given its scant radio play.

On Oct. 30, 1970, Black Sabbath began its first U.S. tour, at Glassboro College in New Jersey. In Memphis a few stops later, a group of Satanists with candles and black robes camped out in front of the band's hotel. To appease them, Osbourne went outside the next morning, blew out their candles, and sang "Happy Birthday"—still a joker, but now also a superstar.

Sabbath retained its golden touch on the band's third album, *Master of Reality*. Released on July 21, 1971, it ran a brisk 34 minutes, but was influential nevertheless, hinting at the doom, stoner and sludge metal subgenres to come. That July, Osbourne wed Thelma Riley, his first wife. (He adopted her young



BRIEF PURPLE
Released in 1971, *Master of Reality* (right) was Black Sabbath's third record. Checking in at just 34 minutes, it was short, but still impactful—and it was a hit.

DEMONIC DADDY
Osbourne had two children with his first wife, Thelma Riley: Louis (far left) and Jessica. In Birmingham, England, in 1978, he posed at home with both of them.

GOLDEN NUMBERS
The members of Black Sabbath (from left: Bill Ward, Osbourne, Iommi and Butler) pose in 1973 with gold discs awarded for hundreds of thousands of record sales.

About the only thing that could stop Sabbath was the group itself.

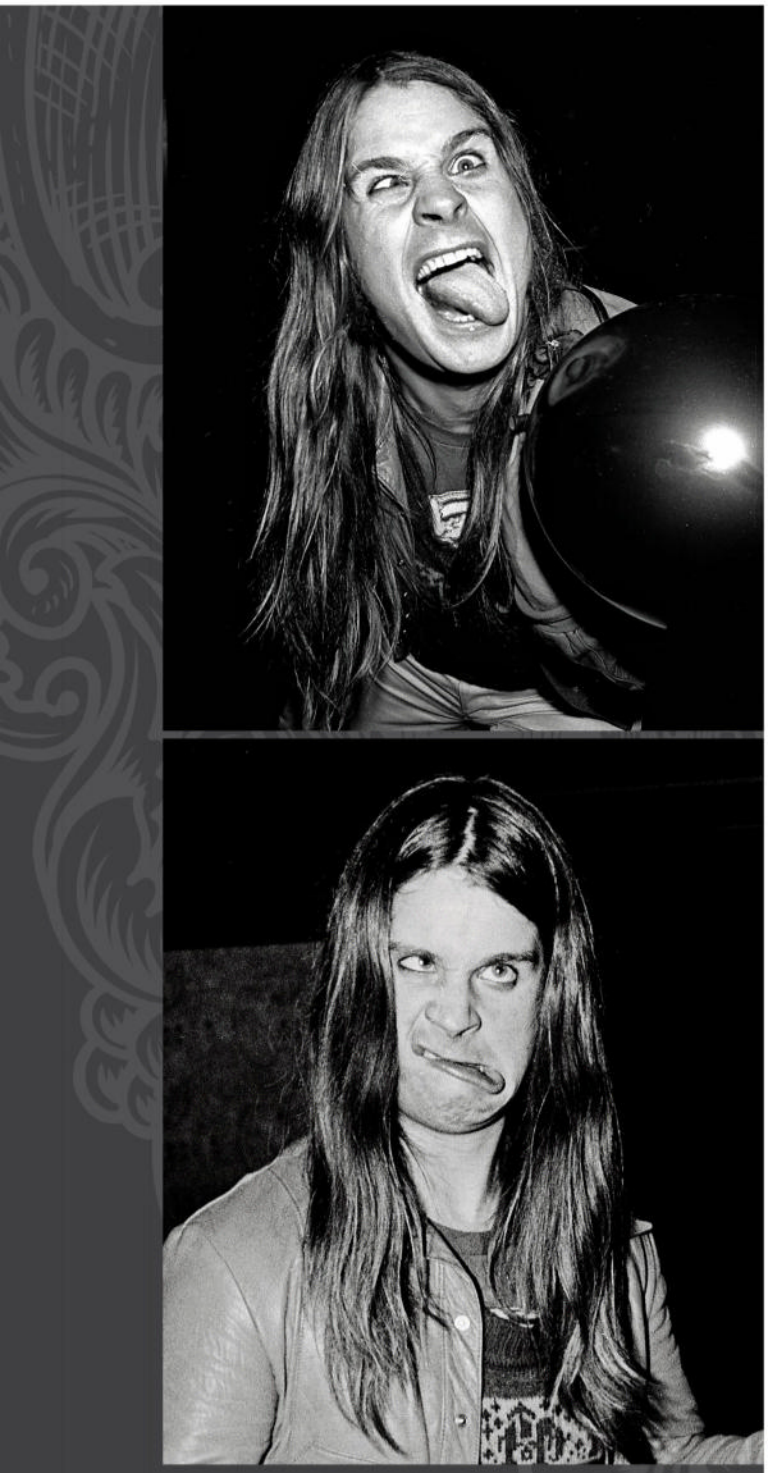
son from a previous relationship, and they later had two children together, a daughter and a son.) His worsening drug and alcohol abuse, though, put an immediate strain on the marriage.

Like so many other rock bands of the era, Black Sabbath was consuming drugs at a high rate. While the band worked on its fourth album—in a six-bedroom mansion in L.A.—a private plane was hired to fly in cocaine for Osbourne and his bandmates. On one occasion, with a mountain of white powder on the table, Osbourne noticed a button next to a window and pushed it, thinking it was for the air conditioner. Nothing happened. He pushed it again. Nothing. Moments later, blue lights flashed outside—it was the police, summoned by the panic button. The maid answered and said everything was OK, but the band barely had time to dispose of $5,000 worth of coke.

The close call did nothing to slow Black Sabbath down. It became common for the four bandmates to go two or three consecutive days without sleep, composing and recording and partying. The libidinous lads—untold numbers of groupies were a constant presence—even recorded parts of the song "FX" while wearing nothing at all. "Eventually we started to wonder where the f--- all the coke was coming from," Osbourne wrote in *I Am Ozzy*.

MUG SHOTS
Ever the clown, Osbourne put on faces for the cameras in the '70s (below right, top and bottom), but the truth wasn't so funny—his drug abuse was getting worse.

STONED AGE
Black Sabbath consumed enormous amounts of cocaine in the 1970s, and nobody in the band partied harder than Osbourne (right, in 1971).



"That coke was the whitest, purest, strongest stuff you could ever imagine."

"I'm telling you: that coke was the whitest, purest, strongest stuff you could ever imagine. One sniff, and you were king of the universe."

With album sales soaring, singles charting and touring ascendant, Black Sabbath could seemingly do no wrong. The band's fourth album, *Vol. 4*, released on Sept. 25, 1972, cost $65,000 to make. The cocaine bill, though, came in at $75,000. The four members of the band had wanted to call the album *Snowblind* because of its "muse"—as well as the title of one of its 10 tracks—but Warner Bros. vetoed the idea. About the only thing that could stop Sabbath was the group itself.

The band's fifth, sixth and seventh albums—*Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (December 1973), *Sabotage* (July 1975), and *Technical Ecstasy* (September 1976)—all did well commercially. But the group's eighth album, *Never Say Die!* (September 1978) was a critical and commercial flop. And underlying tensions among the quartet were beginning to rise to the surface. While working on *Technical Ecstasy*, Osbourne entertained thoughts of collaborating with other artists. He was also prone to questionable decisions. Soon, his escapades with drugs would cause even bigger problems.

Chapter 3

Despite Sabbath's success, Ozzy was bounced from the band he'd started

THE SOLO YEARS

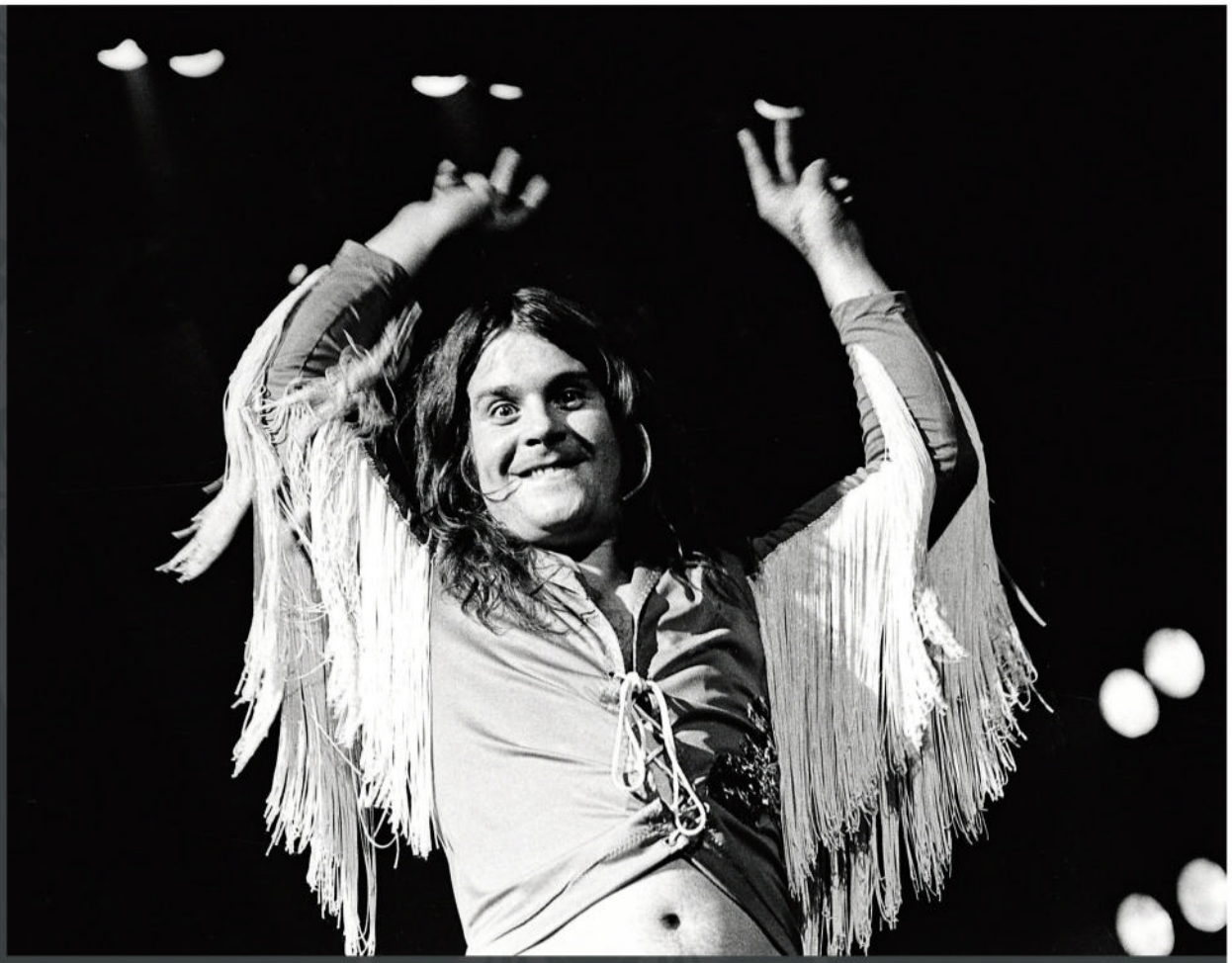
WIZARD OF ROCK
After getting fired from Black Sabbath—and with his finances dwindling and his wife filing for divorce—Osbourne bet everything on a solo career, and not only hit it big, but also produced a heavy metal classic.

On April 27, 1979, after 11 years and eight albums together,

the three members of Black Sabbath other than Ozzy Osbourne ceremoniously fired their feral frontman. Ozzy's partying had become too decadent even among a band of hard partiers. A big part of the problem was that Osbourne's drug use was causing him to simply disappear for long stretches of time—periods when the band was technically working.

"Ozzy was going to clubs and getting really out of it and not coming home," guitarist Tony Iommi explained in the book *Louder Than Hell: The Definitive Oral History of Metal*. "It got to a stage where nothing was happening with him."

When Osbourne did show up, he was often in no condition to sing—which forced the band to make



FRONTMAN DAZE
Osbourne seemed to be in form at a Black Sabbath show in London in 1978 (below, far left), but his drug binges and frequent absences were grating on his bandmates.

POWER TRIO
After kicking Osbourne out, the other members of Black Sabbath (including from left, below, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward) replaced him with Ronnie Dio (below, far right).

A NEEDED LIFT
One of the most important moments in Osbourne's reinvention as a solo artist came when he signed young guitar hero Randy Rhoads (near left) in 1982.

ROARING SUCCESS
Legendarily tough music exec Don Arden (below, right) not only bankrolled Osbourne's solo career, he was also the father of Sharon Levy, Osbourne's future wife.

up excuses for its record label, Warner Bros. "We just couldn't continue with Ozzy," Iommi said. "Nothing was happening and it would have meant the end of the band. We didn't want to fire him, but we had to if we wanted to continue."

Osbourne—who had himself quit Sabbath for a few months in 1977—felt betrayed. "We were four blokes who'd grown up together a few streets apart," he wrote in his 2010 autobiography, *I Am Ozzy*. "We were like family, like brothers. And firing me for being f---ed up was hypocritical bulls--t. We were all f---ed up." (Osbourne admitted a few years later—during a Black Sabbath reunion—that his bandmates had been right to fire him: "I'd be drunk and loaded on the couch at 9 in the morning.")

There were other problems. A bad publishing-rights deal was robbing the band of money, leaving the four members virtually bankrupt. They still had opportunities to make up for it on the road, but during their tour to support *Never Say Die!*, they found to their dismay that they couldn't match the energy or musicianship of a younger, hungrier band: Van Halen.

To make matters worse for Osbourne, his first wife, Thelma, had told him that she wanted a divorce. All his childhood insecurities were suddenly flooding back. In need of money, Osbourne made plans to launch himself as a solo act, an idea supported by a young manager named Sharon Levy, who had known Ozzy since the early 1970s. Her father, Don Arden, was a notoriously ruthless music industry maven who once had a rival dangled over a balcony for intimidation; he also managed Black Sabbath. At his daughter's urging, Arden bankrolled Osbourne's solo career. A short time later, former Quiet Riot guitarist Randy Rhoads signed on ("A gift from God," Osbourne said) as did drummer Lee Kerslake. Everything was in place, but could Osbourne produce?

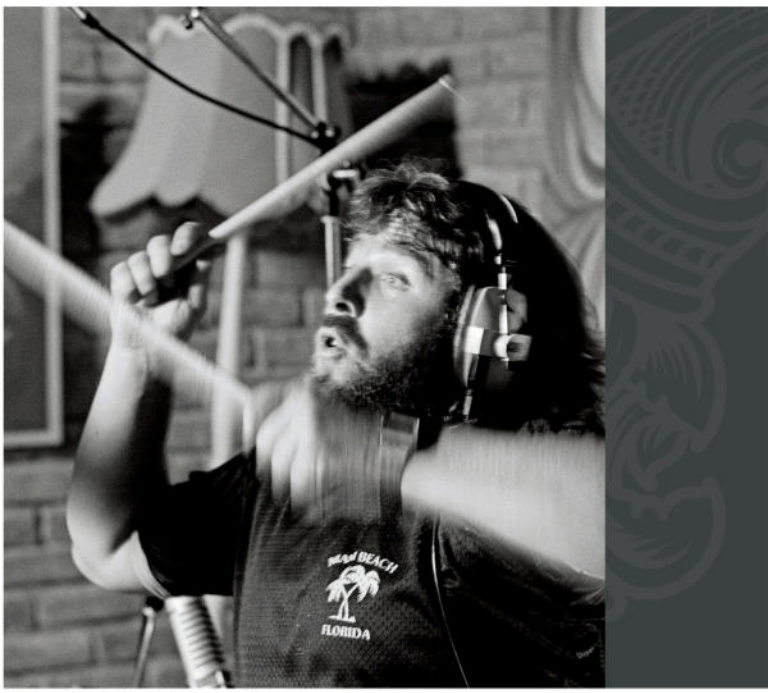
The answer came on Sept. 20, 1980, when his solo debut, *Blizzard of Ozz*, blitzed record stores. Its first single, "Crazy Train," became Osbourne's de facto anthem, peaking at No. 9 in the U.S. on *Billboard*'s Top Tracks chart. Another song, "Suicide Solution"—though never released as a single—was the album's most introspective and personally revealing, as well as its most infamous. The song addressed Osbourne's

Everything was in place, but could Osbourne produce?

CHAPTER 3

NEW LINEUP
Osbourne (center) recording *Blizzard of Ozz* with (from left) bassist Bob Daisley and Rhoads at Ridge Farm Studio in Surrey, England, in 1980.

BACKBEAT MAN
Also at Ridge Farm to record *Blizzard* in 1980 was Osbourne's new drummer, Lee Kerslake (below), formerly of the band Uriah Heep.



own alcoholism, as well as the death of AC/DC frontman Bon Scott, who had succumbed to acute alcohol poisoning that February at 33. (Two teenagers later killed themselves while listening to Osbourne's music—one in 1984 and one in 1986—and their families filed lawsuits against him and his record company, citing "Suicide Solution" as the cause. Both lawsuits were dismissed.)

Controversy aside, Osbourne was back on top. (To date, *Blizzard of Ozz* has sold more records than Black Sabbath's top seller, *Paranoid*.) His follow-up, *Diary of a Madman*, was released on Nov. 7, 1981, six weeks after the *Blizzard* tour ended. Recorded in just three weeks earlier in the year, the album had a hit in "Flying High Again," which reached No. 2 on the *Billboard* Top Tracks chart. To promote the album, Ozzy went back on the road, where his reputation for craziness reached an all-time high—or low. In Des Moines, Iowa, on Jan. 20, 1982, an early *Diary of a Madman* tour date, Osbourne—who had taken to throwing raw meat at the crowd during his concerts—picked up a bat an audience member had thrown onstage. Thinking it was a rubber bat, Ozzy

bit its head off. (He received two rabies shots in his buttocks that night after the show.)

Two months later, on March 19, 1982, tragedy struck. A single-engine plane carrying the 25-year-old Rhoads clipped Osbourne's tour bus—the pilot had been trying to "buzz" it—killing all three people on board the aircraft. In the wake of the tragedy, Osbourne divorced Thelma and married Levy, his young manager, who had been a constant presence at his side during the tour.

During a ceremony in Maui on July 4, 1982, Sharon Levy became Sharon Osbourne. Just as she had done as his manager, she worked tirelessly to keep Ozzy in line. To that end, Sharon began hiding his clothes every night so he couldn't slip out and make trouble. It didn't always work. Five months before their marriage, while on the *Madman* tour in San Antonio, Ozzy slipped on one of Sharon's dresses and ventured into the Texas night. Hours later he was arrested for urinating near the Alamo. He was banned from the city for 10 years.

The antics weren't healthy—but they were now a part of Osbourne's identity. "It got to the point where people expected me to do crazier and crazier things," he said. More often than not, Ozzy delivered.

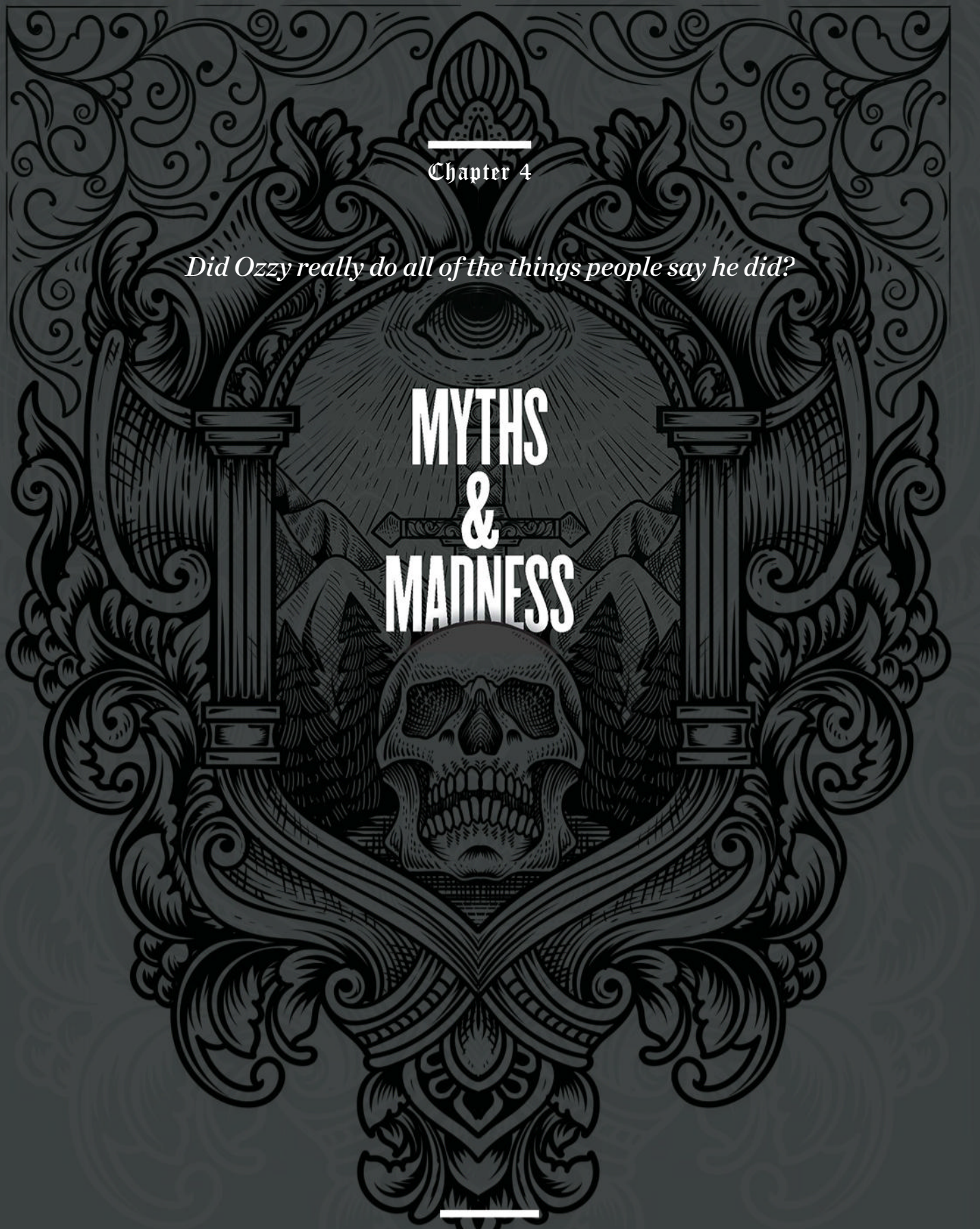
TOUCHY-FEELY
Osbourne had been married to Sharon for only a little more than a year when he was all over her during the recording of *Bark at the Moon* in August 1983 (right).

GOTHAM MADMAN
Osbourne and his band salute the crowd at New York's Madison Square Garden on April 5, 1982, after playing a show on the *Diary of a Madman* Tour (below).

Chapter 4

Did Ozzy really do all of the things people say he did?

MYTHS & MADNESS



TRUE LIES
Osbourne certainly looked the part during the cover shoot for his 1981 album, *Diary of a Madman*. But is he really an agent of the Prince of Darkness? Well... yes and no.

BAT BOY
Regardless of whether the bat was alive at the time, nobody disputes the fact that Osbourne bit the head off one of the flying creatures at a 1982 show.

In 1982, word spread through record shops,

suburban malls and school lunchrooms like a news flash: Ozzy Osbourne had bitten the head off a live bat. It didn't matter if you listened to Osbourne's music or not. The man was a living urban legend.

His antics—real and rumored—became stories passed along to shock and amuse. But what was fact and what was fiction? Over his five decades in the spotlight, Osbourne has been associated with so many tall tales it's time to set the record straight.

Biting the head off a dove

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1981: FACT

Biting the head off of a bat wasn't even Ozzy's most shocking beheading of a flying creature. On March 27, 1981, an inebriated Ozzy walked into an introductory meeting at CBS Records in Century City with two doves tucked into his pockets. He intended to make a grand entrance and release the doves to start the meeting. Instead, Osbourne committed one of the most grisly over-the-top acts in rock history. When a CBS publicist angered him by talking, Osbourne bit the head off one of the doves and spit it onto her lap. (He later said it tasted like Cointreau.) Popular belief holds that he bit the other dove's head off, too. In *I Am Ozzy*, however, the metal frontman says he only acted as if he was going to before letting the dove go to fly around the room. "That's when they kicked me out," he recalled. Sharon later said this about the post-meeting fallout: "[The record company] said, 'If you ever do this again, we won't release the album [the ironically named *Diary of a Madman*] and we'll literally destroy you.' And we're like, 'Oh, OK, thanks.'"

METAL MAYHEM
Mötley Crüe (from left: Nikki Sixx, Vince Neil, Mick Mars and Tommy Lee) opened for Osbourne—and also partied with him—during his Bark at the Moon tour in 1984.

Snorting ants

LAKELAND, FLORIDA, 1984: MAYBE...

"The one tour I will never forget was the Mötley Crüe tour," Osbourne said in the documentary *The Nine Lives of Ozzy Osbourne*. According to legend, at a Florida stop during the unforgettable Bark at the Moon tour—when Mötley Crüe was one of the opening acts—Osbourne snorted a line of ants as if it was a line of cocaine. Per Mötley Crüe's 2001 autobiography, *The Dirt*, he did it after he had run out of cocaine. Crüe bassist Nikki Sixx challenged him to snort a line of ants on the pavement, and—wearing a dress—Osbourne took a straw and proceeded to oblige, "his bare white ass peeking out from under the dress like a sliced honeydew," according to the book. He then went on to hike up the dress and urinate. In 2019, Jake E. Lee—Osbourne's guitarist during the 1984 tour—denied that there had been ants involved. He claimed that Osbourne instead snorted a single spider. Whether ants or a spider, in true Ozzy fashion, Osbourne later said: "I have got absolutely no recollection of doing that." (Another sick story from that tour: According to Mötley Crüe drummer Tommy Lee in the 2011 documentary *God Bless Ozzy Osbourne*, the singer allegedly defecated on the floor of a hotel room and then smeared his feces on the walls like a painter.) "When you're on the bottle, you don't realize you're as bad as you are," Osbourne told *Rolling Stone* that year. "We've all done something that makes us say, 'Did I do that?'"

WILD ORANGE
Osbourne in stills from the 1988 documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years* (above).

BLOWING HIS HORNS
Despite unleashing his inner devil when the mood suits him, Osbourne claims that he does not condone devil worship.

The case of the drunken orange juice pour

1988: FICTION

In her lauded 1988 documentary, *The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years*, director Penelope Spheeris filmed a scene in which Osbourne discusses his substance abuse problems while at his home in his kitchen. He pours a glass of orange juice, and then there's an intercut shot of him missing the glass. Many fans suspected it was staged, and in a 1999 interview, Spheeris confessed that it was. The particular shot of the spilled orange juice was filmed at a different time and then edited in later.

Ozzy Osbourne, devil worshiper

1968-NOW: FICTION

He sings about famed occultist Aleister Crowley, he wears dark glasses, and his stages are veiled in black. Many politicians have likened Osbourne to the devil, and derided his concerts as tantamount to devil worship. But Osbourne is far from a Satan worshiper. He actually prays—to God—before his shows and considers himself a member of the Church of England. But the incidences of bird- and bat-head biting, and the attention that came with them, have spurred the media to harass him about his alleged ties to the hounds of hell throughout his career. It took a toll on Osbourne's psyche. "I don't want anyone to do this devil worship crap; that's not my intention—I don't want anyone to hurt themselves," he told Geraldo Rivera in 1988 during the host's special about Satanism. "I don't feel guilty; I feel kind of persecuted by everybody. I'm not a bad guy."

And two more things about that bat:

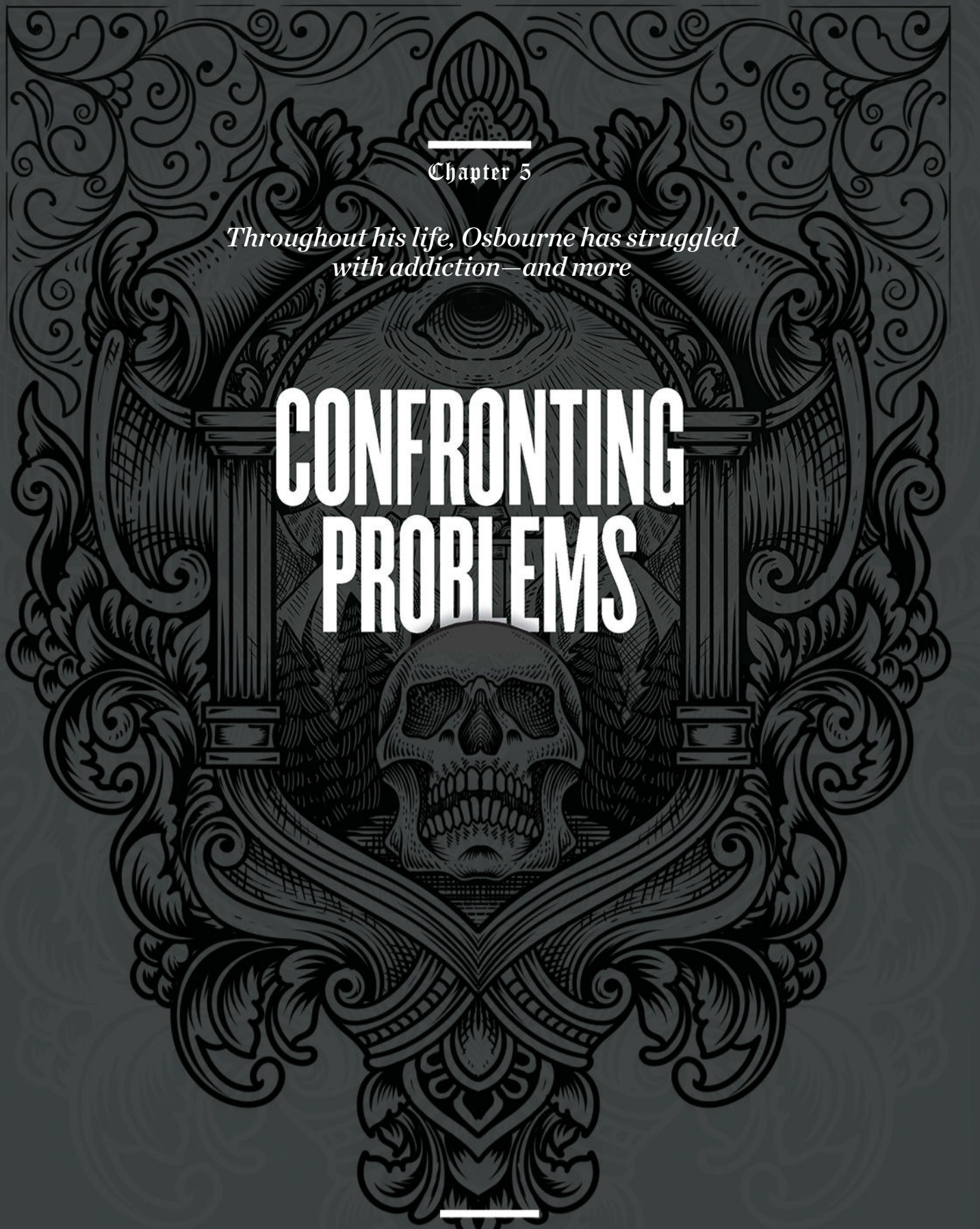
BOTH FACTS

First, to commemorate the act, Ozzy released a foot-tall plush bat in 2019—the head was removable. Second, in 2015, concertgoer Mark Neal told the *Des Moines Register* that he'd brought the infamous bat to the 1982 concert in a plastic bag, but that it was already dead when he tossed it onstage. So, technically, Osbourne did not bite the head off a *live* bat.

Chapter 5

Throughout his life, Osbourne has struggled with addiction—and more

CONFRONTING PROBLEMS



DO OR DIE
Osbourne at the Rosemont Horizon, in Rosemont, Illinois, on March 4, 1984, during the Bark at the Moon tour. Seven months later, he would check himself into rehab after his wife had threatened to divorce him.

Booze, coke, heroin, acid, Quaaludes, glue, cough syrup, Rohypnol, Klonopin, Vicodin. Ozzy Osbourne indulged in it all. "On more than a few occasions, I was on all of those at the same time," he once said.

From his teenage years until well into adulthood, Osbourne ingested copious amounts of drugs and alcohol. Publicly, he always treated the subject with humor. "Sobriety f---in' sucks," he once famously said. He also said, "My head still thinks that my ass is 21," and, "One's too many, and 10's not enough." But the most truthful and candid thing Osbourne ever said about his serious addiction problems was this: "It's fair to say without my wife I would have been long dead."

Osbourne has admitted that the root of his problem is self-esteem. "I've had great success in my life, but I've never felt great about myself," he told *Variety* in February 2021. "And so, from a very early age, I used

SPEEDBALL SPOONFUL
Although Osbourne was joking in 1971 when he mimed snorting drugs from a spoon (above), for years he ingested all sorts of drugs in all sorts of ways.

RAISE A GLASS
Osbourne (second from right) once toasted every occasion with a drink. In 1978, he and his Black Sabbath bandmates saluted the band's 10th anniversary.

BLACK SABBATH
BLACK SABBATH

GUARDIAN ANGEL
Ozzy's sobriety is due to the heroic efforts of Sharon to help him stay clean—even after he tried to kill her in a drug-induced hysteria in 1989.

> "I've had great success in my life, but I've never felt great about myself."

to sniff fumes, all kinds of things, anything to get me out of my head."

In the 1970s and '80s—the peak of Osbourne's career—his insecurities and substance abuse combined with the rock 'n' roll lifestyle to create a persona that was totally out of control, resulting in blackouts, public urination, arrests, violence and affairs. The only person who did not laugh off "Ozzy being Ozzy" was his wife, Sharon, who eventually convinced him that he needed to change.

In 1984, Sharon Osbourne gave her husband an ultimatum: Go to rehab or their marriage was over. Ozzy agreed, but Sharon was pregnant with their second child, and he wanted to wait until after the birth. (Their first child, daughter Aimee, had been born in September 1983.) Kelly Osbourne was born on Oct. 27, 1984. The next day, Osbourne checked himself into the Betty Ford Center. His first question when he arrived was, "Where's the bar?"

But this attempt at sobriety did not stick. His addiction hit rock bottom in August 1989 when, under the influence of drugs and alcohol, he attacked Sharon in their home in the English countryside, lunging at her throat and choking her before blacking out. When he came to, he was behind bars, in suburban London's Amersham prison. The guard read him

the charge: "John Michael has been arrested for the attempted murder of Sharon Osbourne."

"Is this a joke?" he answered. Sharon dropped the charges, but he was ordered to rehab for six months. "I could have killed Sharon, and that's a desperate feeling," he said in the 2020 documentary *The Nine Lives of Ozzy Osbourne*. "She's my soulmate and I love her."

Osbourne's family has always tried to help him shake his substance abuse—with mixed results. His father, just before dying in 1978, had told his son: "Do something about your drinking." Ozzy's response? "So I had a drink." Sharon took a different approach. "[An addict's] going to stop when they want to stop," she said.

For the Osbournes, the problem may be hereditary. Both Kelly and her younger brother, Jack (who was born in 1985), have battled addiction. In 2021, Jack celebrated 18 years of sobriety, while Kelly relapsed that October after having been clean for nearly five years. Once, during a row with Jack, Ozzy asked: "What have you ever f---ing wanted? I'll give you whatever you want." Jack replied, "What about a father?" It knocked Ozzy "sideways." He realized he hadn't truly been there for his children.

Osbourne's personal struggle seems to be never-ending. In an April 2013 Facebook post, he confessed

BABY BITE
Osbourne mugs for the camera at home in the U.K., two weeks after Sharon gave birth to his youngest child, Jack (right), on Nov. 25, 1985.

ENGLISH ROSE
Sharon Osbourne (left, in 1988) is a wife, a mother, a manager and a nursemaid. For 40 years, she has tried to keep her husband off drugs and out of trouble.

HAPPY FAMILY
Ozzy and Sharon at home with their three children (from left: Kelly, Jack and Aimee) in the early 1990s—a decade before the family became pop-culture icons.

ON JACK'S BACK
Ozzy and his son Jack, then 25, pose for photographers on the red carpet at New York's Tribeca Film Festival on April 26, 2011.

that "for the last year and a half I have been drinking and taking drugs. I was in a very dark place and was an a--hole to the people I love most, my family."

In a December 2003 interview with the *Daily Mirror*, Osbourne revealed another explanation for his behavior: At age 11, he had been sexually abused on a regular basis. "Two boys used to wait for me to come home after school," he said. "They would force me to drop my pants and all that s--t. They felt me and touched me and ... it was terrible. I was afraid to tell my father or mother and it completely f---ed me up." (According to Sue Crawford's 2002 biography, *Ozzy Unauthorized*, Osbourne had attempted to hang himself when he was 14.)

In March 2022, Ozzy explained that he'd been seeing a therapist for the previous three years to help him deal with his traumas. "It is OK. You ain't stupid for going to a f---ing therapist, but you are stupid not to go if you need them," he said, imploring others not to feel stigmatized for seeking help.

Osbourne's honesty with his problems has always endeared him to his fans. Juxtaposed against his larger-than-life personality, his bracing honesty makes him relatable. It's a quality that helped pave the way for a new, and rather unexpected, second act—one that turned out to be an even bigger pop-culture phenomenon than anything he had accomplished in rock 'n' roll.

Chapter 6

Through reality TV, the Osbourne family found an entirely new fan base

EVERYONE LOVES OZZY

OSBOURNE AGAIN
What started out as a reality show about a heavy metal demigod who's also a family man turned into something much more. Along the way, Sharon and Ozzy Osbourne became America's TV Mom and Dad.

MADMAN & WIFE
Ozzy with the infamous remote (top left). The show's biggest revelation was that Sharon (bottom left, with dog, Minnie) was the true head of the household.

FUNCTIONAL FAMILY
The Osbournes showed Ozzy and his family (from left: Sharon, Jack and Kelly) to be not only normal, but also—in their own, heavy metal way—loving and close-knit.

With Ozzy Osbourne, the show has always been about more than just music.

Ozzy built his reputation on shock and surprise. But one of the most jaw-dropping reveals of his career happened on the premiere episode of MTV's celebrity reality program *Cribs* in September 2000, when daughter Kelly Osbourne told the world that her father was a fan of teen sensation Britney Spears.

As the middle-aged Ozzy gave a tour of his Beverly Hills mansion, surrounded by career souvenirs, religious artifacts, and a table full of framed old photos, a new side of rock's Prince of Darkness was publicly revealed: the family man.

The episode exposed Ozzy, and his entire family, as partly what rock fans expected, and partly something else: witty, loving and relatable. Soon after the *Cribs* episode aired, TV producers had lunch with Ozzy, Sharon and their three children—Aimee, Kelly and Jack—to explore the idea of a new reality TV concept—a heavy metal version of the classic family sitcom, only with no scripts and no studio audience.

MTV shot test footage and hired producers. The family was moving into a new house in Beverly Hills, and executive producer Greg Johnston imagined a mashup of *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *The Real World*.

THE GOOD FIGHT
Although Ozzy and Sharon frequently bickered on *The Osbournes*, there was no denying the show's undercurrent of a loving and warm-hearted family.

> "I'd never have agreed to any of it if I'd known what I was letting myself in for."

The idea was inspired. *The Osbournes* had the potential to become *The Brady Bunch* of the new millennium. But Ozzy was not fully on board. For all of his disarming likeability, he worried the show might ruin his image. Did he really want fans of the "madman" to know that in his off hours, he hung around the house in sweatpants watching World War II documentaries? (Eventually, this was shown on the program.) "I'd never have agreed to any of it if I'd known what I was letting myself in for," he wrote in his book *I Am Ozzy*. "No f---ing way, man." Osbourne reluctantly agreed, partly because he believed public interest would hold for only one or two episodes.

Production began in fall of 2001—oldest daughter Aimee chose not to participate—and the show premiered on March 5, 2002. *The Osbournes* was an instant hit. America couldn't get enough of the rock-star dad baffled by the remote control—"weather in Afghanistan 2,000 degrees and cloudy," he joked when he couldn't flip from the Weather Channel—as well as by the relentless madness of his own household.

Osbourne was completely reinvented as America's new TV Dad. And the classic moments seemed to come every episode, simply by showing what ordinary situations looked like in the hands of the Osbourne family: Ozzy and Sharon's sex talk,

GOLDEN MOMENT
In September 2002, two months after being diagnosed with colon cancer, Sharon—a producer of *The Osbournes*—won an Emmy for best non-fiction program.

WHERE THE HEART IS
Ozzy and his family were just moving into a six-bedroom, 11-bathroom mansion in Beverly Hills (below) when production first began on *The Osbournes*.

Ozzy and Jack throwing firecrackers on a fishing trip, Kelly and Jack in a sibling argument.

As the show's popularity grew, it became clear that Ozzy was the joke. But he was also in on it—and profiting from it. And then, all at once, the laughing stopped. In July 2002, Sharon was diagnosed with colon cancer. She underwent surgery two days after the discovery, and Season 2 of *The Osbournes* chronicled her treatment. While Sharon was enduring chemotherapy, Kelly said that her father was self-medicating more than she'd ever seen. "I had kind of swallowed the pill that she ain't gonna make it," he said. The show surprised audiences by revealing how much Ozzy Osbourne loved his wife.

In September 2002, Sharon—one of the show's producers—won an Emmy for Outstanding Non-Fiction Program. Two months later, Jack and Kelly claimed that some of the show's episodes had been scripted, which Ozzy denied. Eventually, even he couldn't even bring himself to watch it, horrified by his behavior.

After four seasons, MTV canceled the show. *The Osbournes* is credited with paving the way for other celebrity reality shows, most notably *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. "Having a camera crew in your house 24/7, you feel like a f---ing experiment," Ozzy said in 2017. "We pulled the plug because we started to run out of ideas."

SIBLING SIT-DOWN
In the 10th episode of Season 4, Jack and Kelly tried to work out their problems with each other by confiding in Dr. Phil.

"We pulled the plug because we started to run out of ideas."

In 2009, MTV rebooted the series with *Osbournes Reloaded*, but it lasted only six episodes, with only the first actually airing—*Time* magazine asked if it was "The Saddest Comedy Ever?" In 2016, Ozzy and Jack returned with another reality show, *Ozzy & Jack World Detour*, in which the two history buffs traveled the world—in their own, unique way, of course. In 2020, the family made another 20-episode reality series entitled *The Osbournes Want to Believe*, in which Jack showed his parents unexplained videos to see if they believed them. That year, they also made a paranormal investigation TV special that aired on the Travel Channel, *The Osbournes: Night of Terror*.

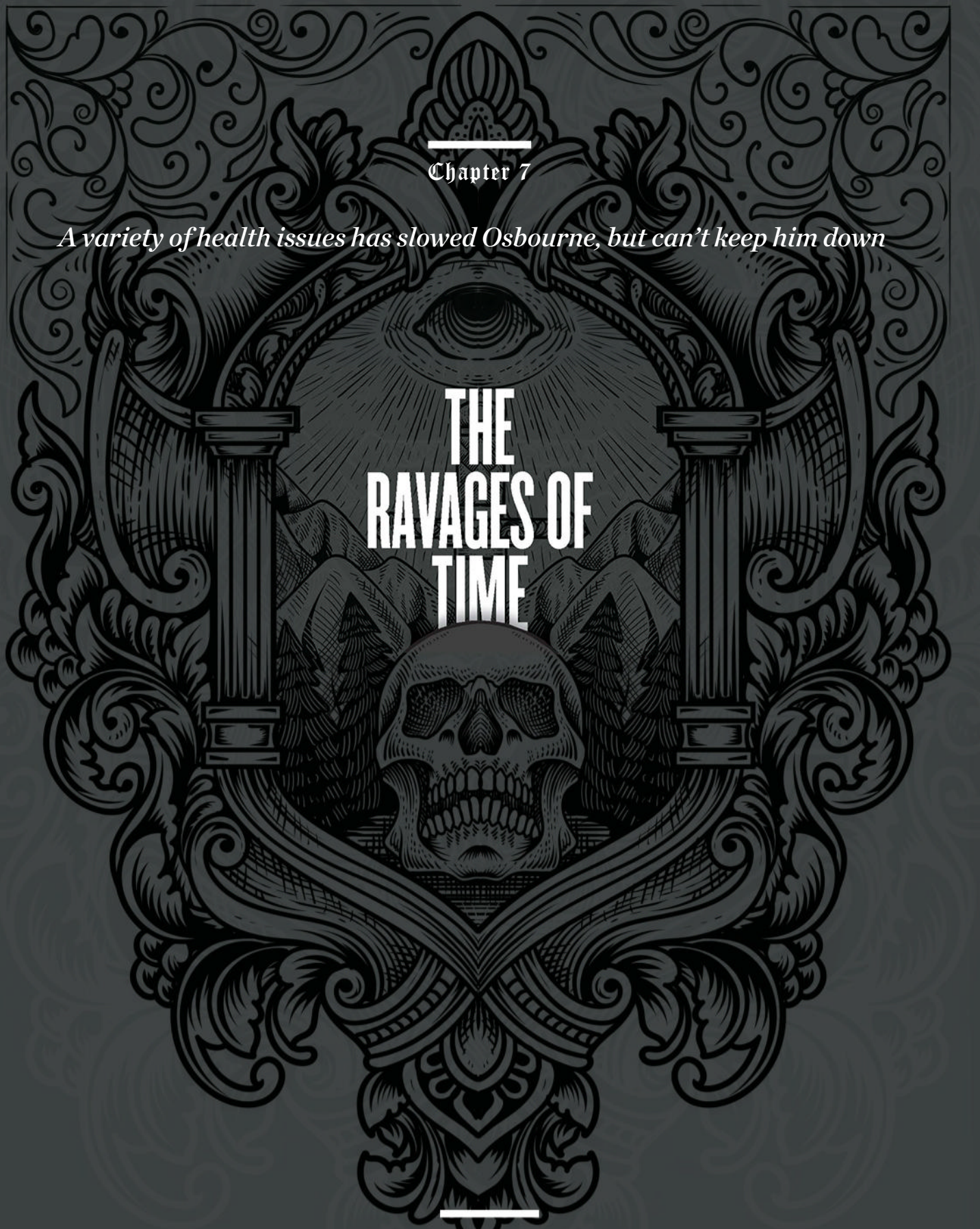
And then, in late August 2022, Ozzy announced that he and Sharon soon would be leaving the U.S. and moving back to England because of gun violence in America. A few days later, the BBC announced a new Osbourne family reality series, *Home to Roost*. According to production notes, the show "will follow the Osbournes as they celebrate one of their most important years yet—with everything from Sharon's 70th birthday to Kelly's soon-to-be-born baby [with Slipknot DJ Sid Wilson], Ozzy's tour, and of course, the big move itself."

Ozzy had this to say: "Everything's f---ing ridiculous [in the U.S.] ... I'm fed up with people getting killed every day." Once again, he'd found a unique way to surprise his fans. This time, by making a reality show about escaping reality itself.

Chapter 7

A variety of health issues has slowed Osbourne, but can't keep him down

THE RAVAGES OF TIME



PLAYING HURT
Ever the showman, Osbourne is driven to perform—even after some serious health setbacks. On Sept. 8, 2022, he sang at halftime of the NFL's season-opening game at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California.

CHAPTER 7

HALF SABBATH
On Aug. 18, 2022, Osbourne returned to the stage alongside former bandmate Tony Iommi (near right) at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, England.

After the smashing success of The Osbournes,

it felt as if Ozzy Osbourne was suddenly everywhere: on one of his reality programs, at awards shows, in commercials. And then, almost as abruptly, he wasn't. In January 2020, the singer announced that he had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a progressive—and incurable—nervous system disorder that affects movement and usually causes tremors, stiffness and slurred speech. He called his case "mild," but noted that it still caused him "agony."

This, along with other health problems (including COVID-19), caused Osbourne to slip into a depression. Paparazzi photos of him looking gray-haired, frail, and sometimes using a wheelchair or a walker, painted an ominous picture: Mortality had finally caught up to Ozzy Osbourne.

Then, like Lazarus, he emerged in late August 2022, two months removed from a successful spinal operation that he described as "life-altering." Over tea, the

IRON MAN
There was nothing dark about Osbourne's brave show at the Commonwealth Games. Buckled into position to keep from falling, he sang with gusto and obvious joy.

> "He doesn't need pity," Sharon says. "He just needs a stage."

Prince of Darkness made a bold proclamation. "You have not seen the end of Ozzy Osbourne, I promise you," he told *The Guardian*. "If I have to go up there and die on the first song, I'll still be back the next day."

Coming from anyone other than Osbourne, the statement would hardly seem credible. Osbourne is in his mid-70s, and he has already outlived the sort of dissipation and destructive impulses that have ended many other lives. He'd also already come back from an accident that almost killed him.

In December 2003, while filming for TV, Osbourne fell off a moving ATV at his Buckinghamshire estate. He ended up in intensive care at Wexham Park Hospital in the town of Slough with eight fractured ribs, a cracked vertebrae in his neck and a broken collarbone. There was also bleeding in one lung. "He had stopped breathing for a minute and a half and there was no pulse," Sharon Osbourne told the *Daily Mirror*. Incredibly, Ozzy discharged himself—against his doctors' advice—four weeks later. Sharon said they told him he was going to die.

Fifteen years later, while on tour in October 2018, Osbourne's thumb started bothering him. He also

SONGS OF EXPERIENCE
Osbourne's latest album, *Patient Number 9*, came out in September 2022 (below). The day after its release, he was signing copies in Long Beach, California (right).

noticed he couldn't wear his thumb ring. The digit eventually ballooned to, as Ozzy described it, "the size of a f---in' light bulb," and he had surgery for three staph infections. Osbourne said he couldn't wipe his own behind, but as he told *Rolling Stone*, "It could have been a lot worse. I could have been dead."

Not long after, in January 2019, Osbourne endured a horrendous bathroom fall that left him thinking he was paralyzed. He called 2019 the "worst, longest, most painful, miserable year of my life." And that was prior to the global pandemic.

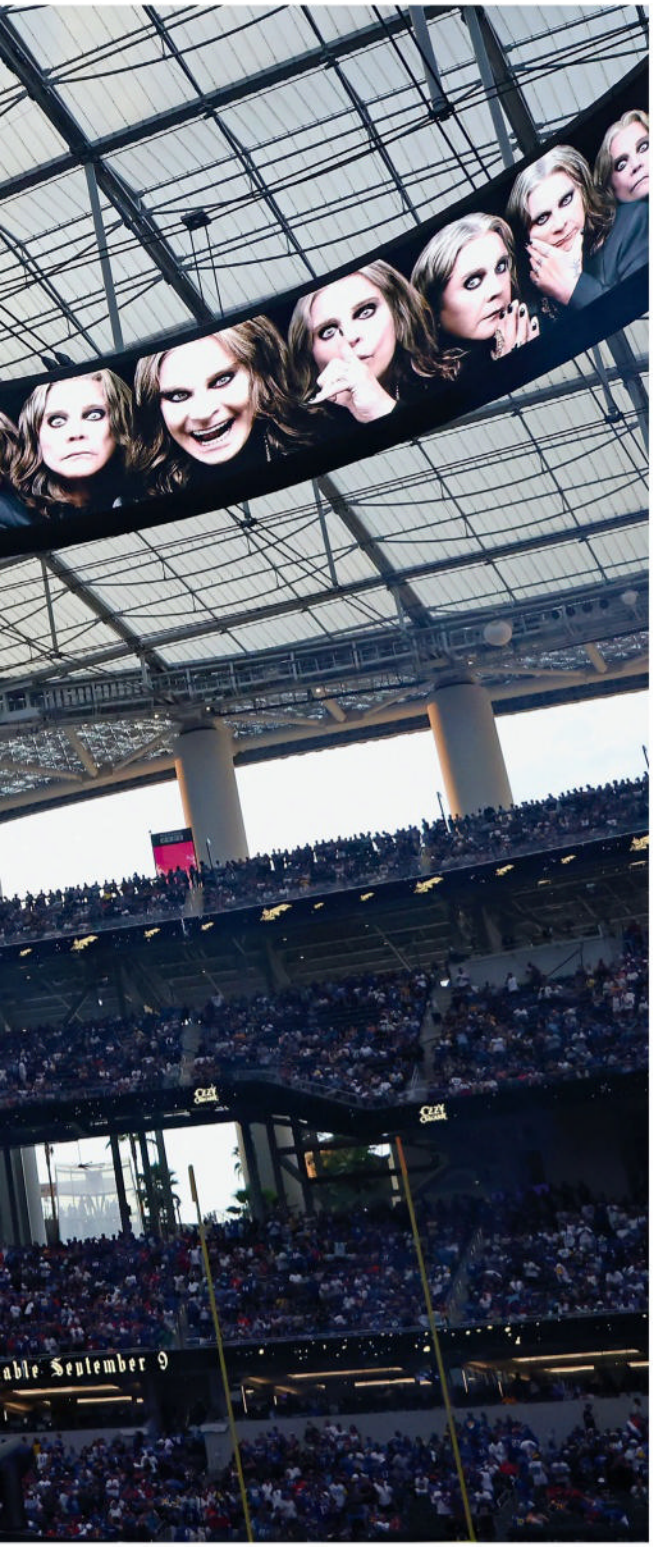
But Osbourne's outlook brightened after he underwent a reported three corrective surgeries on his spine—the latest on June 13, 2022—to remove and realign pins in his neck and back. "I am now home from the hospital recuperating comfortably," Osbourne wrote afterward. "I am definitely feeling the love and support from all my fans and send everyone a big thank you for their thoughts, prayers and well wishes during my recovery."

After all Osbourne had endured, survival would have been a triumph. But he staged another comeback two months later, performing alongside former

PATIENT NUMBER 9

OPENING ACT
The halftime gig at the NFL's season opener in Inglewood, California, on Sept. 8, 2022, was a warm-up show for Osbourne's planned tour of Europe in 2023.

BIGGEST FAN
Watching Ozzy perform his halftime show (with evident emotion) was Sharon, who has seen him through every major setback—and triumph—of the last 40 years.



Black Sabbath bandmate Tony Iommi to close the Commonwealth Games in their hometown of Birmingham. After a teased intro, Osbourne thundered, "I am Iron Man" from backstage, and then he, Iommi and the band played "Paranoid."

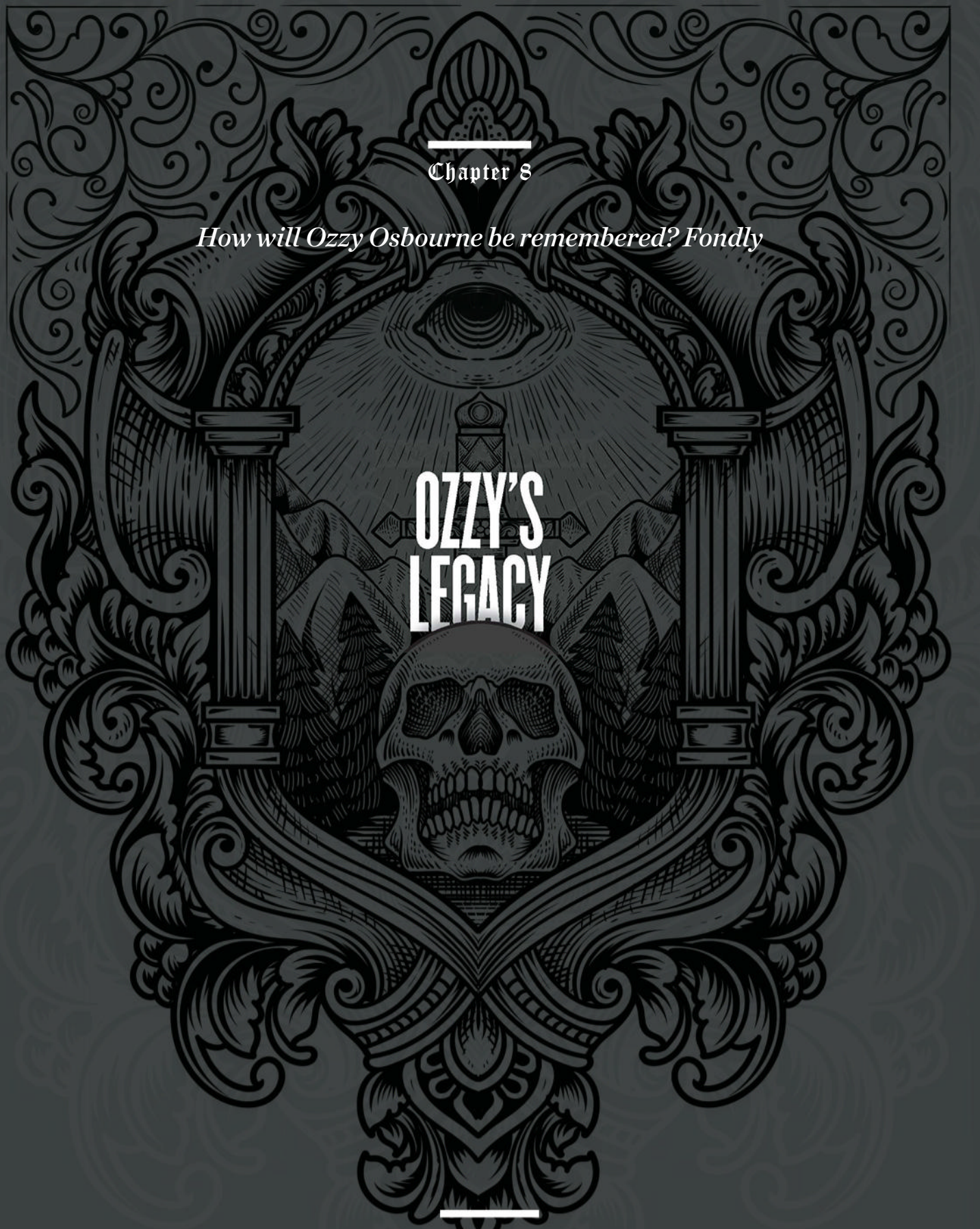
Once again, Osbourne had made his miraculous recovery with support from the person who has stood by his side through the very worst of times: his wife, Sharon. It was she who ensured Ozzy was safe onstage at the Commonwealth Games by buckling him into place to prevent a fall because of his Parkinson's.

Osbourne has plans to ramp up rather than slow down, with a new solo studio album, *Patient Number 9*, that came out on Sept. 9, 2022, as well as set dates for a 2023 tour of Europe. "You know the time when I will retire? When I can hear them nail a lid on my box," he said. "And then I'll f---ing do an encore."

Leave it to Osbourne to treat his life—and unavoidable death—lightly. But Sharon is much more serious about why her husband continues to push himself to perform: He loves it. "He doesn't need pity," Sharon says. "He just needs a stage."

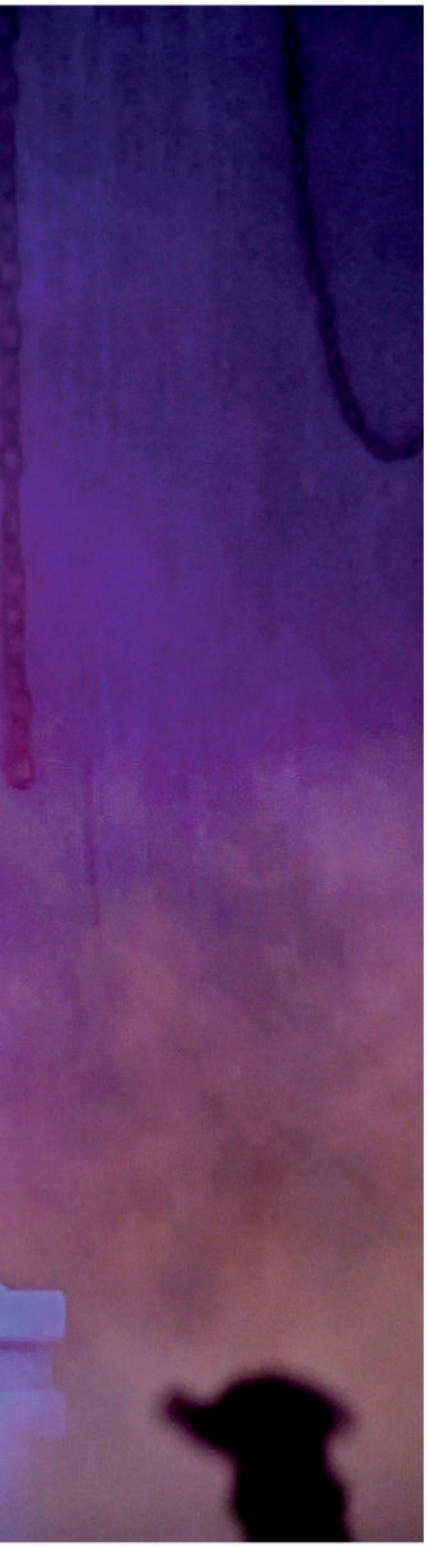
Chapter 8

How will Ozzy Osbourne be remembered? Fondly



A SIMPLE MAN

Osbourne has lived a complex, colorful and wonderful life. He's earned a rest—but that's not his style. He loves performing and making people happy. And he's determined to do both for as long as he can.



ELDER STATESMAN
Leaning on his cane, the 70-year-old Osbourne presents Post Malone (above, left) with a box set of all his solo material in Los Angeles in 2019.

POST PLAYERS
Osbourne performing "Take What You Want" with Malone (far left) at the American Music Awards in Los Angeles on Nov. 24, 2019.

When genre-bending musician Post Malone

released the single "Take What You Want" on Sept. 6, 2019, many fans recognized one of the song's collaborators—rapper Travis Scott—but they weren't so certain about another: Ozzy Osbourne. Some thought the distinctive voice singing the intro might be a new, wannabe pop star.

In the first four days after it dropped, the song gained more than 985,500 views and 35,000 likes, and social media boiled over with newbies wondering about Post Malone's talent "discovery." One Twitter post read: "who tf is ozzy osbourne ???!??! this is why I love post malone for shining light on unknown artists." (The message appeared to be

presented to
OZZY OSBOURNE
by PHONOGRAM U.K.

CRAZY BRAIN
In London in 1973, Osbourne mugs while holding a flower pot and a gold disc, which honored Black Sabbath for selling more than 100,000 copies of *Paranoid* (left).

SIGN OF THE TIMES
In an undated photo, Osbourne signs autographs for fans in Toronto (below). He's said that fans are the best part of his job—better than any drug or relationship.

unironic, and the handle belonged to someone apparently in their 20s.) While some posters were clearly trolling, more than a few genuinely didn't know from whence the wicked Ozzy had come.

To an entire generation of new fans, Osbourne is less an iconic heavy metal singer and more the pop-culture phenomenon from *The Osbournes*. But what bonds the two identities is one unifying truth: People like him. He seems like a good guy—one most people want to see succeed.

Osbourne, of course, has a different take. Through his eyes, he's more like a Gothic Charlie Brown—a working-class bloke from Birmingham who has somehow found success that could, and likely will, evaporate at any moment. "Talking to him, I'm like, 'Do you feel like you've done it?'" son Jack Osbourne said in the documentary *The Nine Lives of Ozzy Osbourne*. "And he's like, 'No.' And that kills me. He's never sat back and gone, 'I'm good. I did it.' There's guilt and shame associated with his journey."

When he was younger, Ozzy disguised his vulnerabilities with bravado. As he was racking up 13 platinum solo albums, audiences saw—and enjoyed—a boisterous libertine. "The idea of being free like Ozzy is very exciting," said famed record producer Rick Rubin, who produced Black Sabbath's 2013 reunion album, *13*.

But Osbourne can also turn introspective—too much so, at times. "I'm not a serious f---ing singer," he told *Rolling Stone* in 2018. "I'm just a frontman who's trying to get the crowd going."

Perhaps so... Not that this ability is anything that diminishes what Osbourne means to the world.

At this point in his life and career, it's impossible for him to escape the duality of what he represents. To some, he's still the Prince of Darkness. To others, he's a funny father and granddad. His songs have generated millions of plays on Spotify. He's the subject of countless memes on social media. He's still the singer whose music and antics parents once feared, and yet—since 1999—he's also been the model for a toy with accessories that include doves and bats with their heads bitten off. At the introductory press conference for the muscular action figure, Osbourne quipped: "I look a bit like Conan the Barbarian on LSD."

Though he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame as a member of Black Sabbath in 2006, in the band's 11th year of eligibility, he initially wasn't keen on the honor. Seven years earlier, in a letter to the Hall of Fame, Osbourne had said that he wanted the band's name pulled from contention

SON RISE
Ozzy lifts 2-week-old Jack Osbourne at his home in the U.K. on Nov. 25, 1985 (right). Jack is Ozzy's youngest child; the singer has an older son with his first wife.

GIRL DAD
On March 13, 2006, at Black Sabbath's induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Ozzy posed with youngest daughter Kelly (far left).

> "To be honest, just being remembered would be an achievement to me."

because fans weren't allowed to vote. "It's voted on by the supposed elite for the industry and the media, who've never bought an album or concert ticket in their lives, so their vote is irrelevant to me," he wrote. "Let's face it, Black Sabbath has never been media darlings. We're a people's band and that suits us just fine."

Osbourne does, indeed, like "the people" that have supported him all these years. It shows in the way he's almost always smiling when he performs. He once said that audiences are "better than any drugs, alcohol, sex, woman, relationship, apart from my immediate family."

The truth is, Osbourne is a simple man who has lived a colorful, complicated life. He loves three things: performing, making people happy, and his family. Everything else is a bit too confounding to understand.

In *The Nine Lives of Ozzy Osbourne*, a teary-eyed Jack Osbourne summed up his father's legacy in a way his dad cannot. "His music has touched every generation that's been exposed to it since it came out. His contributions have been far greater than any of his faults. That's how he should be remembered."

Touching, sweet and true. But Osbourne himself should have the final say: "To be honest, just being remembered would be an achievement to me."

THE SHOWMAN
Osbourne doing what he does best—connecting with the crowd—at the Moscow Music Peace Festival at Luzhniki Stadium in the USSR in August 1989.

OZZY OSBOURNE

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The Story of
OZZY OSBOURNE
"I have a genuine love affair with my audience.
When I'm on stage they're not privileged
to see me. It's a privilege for me to see them."
OZZY OSBOURNE